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# Close Calls and Good People



The story behind the  
Cherokee  
National Forest's  
Ocoee Whitewater  
Center

**United States  
Department of  
Agriculture**



## **National Agricultural Library**

promotion of economic development in the Ocoee Region. This partnership led to the creation of the world's greatest whitewater facility.



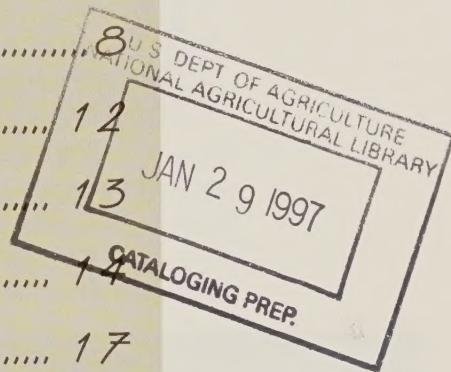
For more information about the Cherokee National Forest's Ocoee Whitewater Center contact:  
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*(On Cover) John Lubill, five time world champion, negotiates rapid appropriately named, Humongous. Photo by Robert Harrison.*

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## *Introduction by Bill Endicott*

A little while back, when I was in ancient Olympia viewing the ruins of another Olympic venue, I had a flash thought about the Ocoee project: what a close call it was, and how many good people were involved. But that, I concluded, was only in keeping with whitewater canoeing as I knew it!

I remember other close calls: Cathy Hearn winning the 1979 World Championships by half a second; Jon Lugbill's whole career apparently ending in the fall of 1981 due to a mysterious allergy to exercise — until a chance meeting with my college classmate, now a physician, led to a cure; and watching Maryland Governor Donald Schaefer successfully tap Marriot Hotels when no one else could produce the money to finance the 1989 World Championships, the first ever in the United States.

But having the Olympic Games slalom event in America takes the cake. First, there was the hurdle of getting the Olympic Games to America — I remember everyone thinking then that Greece would get the Centennial Games.

Then, there was the hurdle of getting Atlanta to include whitewater slalom. Everything depended on Tennessee's ability to finance it at no cost to the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games.

Enter the much-maligned Federal Government, in the form of the USDA Forest Service, at the urging of U.S. Senator Jim Sasser. A multi faceted, private-public partnership ensued among the Forest Service, Tennessee Valley Author-

ity, Tennessee Ocoee Development Agency, Ocoee Region Canoe & Kayak Association, and the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games. The story of how all this developed is the subject of this book.

The result has been an unparalleled accomplishment: the first Olympic Games slalom event on a natural river. The Cherokee National Forest is a fitting and dramatic setting. The course that architect John Anderson and water resource engineer Rick McLaughlin designed is magnificent. Finally, it is our hope and belief that, long after the 1996 Olympic Games, the venue will act as an economic magnet for the Ocoee River region.

As for the number of people involved, the three dozen names referenced in this book, merely symbolize the thousands of people — gate judges, ticket takers, shuttle drivers — who have contributed in one way or another.



Bill Endicott (center) provides technical advice to Paul Wright (left) and John Anderson (right).



I'd like to single out one of these people, Paul Wright, the Ocoee Project Director for the USDA Forest Service. He's too modest to tell you, but it was Paul who held the whole project together in the early years, before many of the players got organized. He planned it, helped to get the partners into play, kept their options open for them while they learned what they had to do, and generally protected the taxpayer's investment. I particularly admire his sense of humor!

I remember one day, perhaps the nadir of the whole project, when several Congressmen were on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives threatening to cut the funding for the Ocoee project. Paul told me, "Bill, in 1996, we'll look back on this over a few beers and laugh!" Well, here's one for you, buddy: it couldn't have been done without you!

And so, as we turn to the Olympic Games scoreboard during second runs, as someone narrowly takes over the lead, and as we sense the thrill of another close call, let us remember all that it took to get to this place . . . let us remember how one Olympic poet, Pindar, put it 2,000 years ago:

"Accomplishments without venture win no praise among men.  
Splendor of toil is remembered by many."

*Bill Endicott was an alternate for the 1972 Olympic Team, Head Slalom Coach at the 1992 Olympic Games, and NBC commentator at the 1996 Olympic Games. He was also technical advisor for the Ocoee River Project.*



Tracy Powers



## Dreams of Olympic Gold

**I**lympic dreams are usually framed in terms of gold medals — of athletic glories and heart-wrenching defeats. Rarely are they described in terms of years of meetings or of dark, wintry days spent moving rocks and pouring concrete. But the story of how whitewater racing came to the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, and how a dried-up stretch of river in Tennessee was transformed into America's Olympic river is far from usual. True, it did start with a dream — a dream backed by a mountain of persistence and hundreds of thousands of hours of human dedication.

The dream took shape in the mind of an Atlanta dentist, Dr. David Jones, an avid wildwater paddler and coach. Jones saw a chance to put his sport on the map when the City of Atlanta began preparing in January 1989 what most saw as a long-shot bid for the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games. Whitewater slalom paddling would make its second appearance ever in the summer games in Barcelona in 1992, which furthered Jones' desire.

Jones recruited fellow Atlanta Whitewater Club members Mike Larimer, a former racer and soon-to-be U.S. Team coach, Larimer's C-2 partner Steve Thomas, and Don Giddens, Georgia Tech aerospace professor and father of an aspiring young kayak racer. Larimer was also director of the newly formed Atlanta Center of Excellence (ACE), a whitewater training center sponsored by the U.S. Canoe and Kayak Team (USCKT). On behalf of the U.S. Team, they approached the Atlanta Organizing Committee (AOC) with their idea, and were met with keen interest whereupon Jones, Larimer, Thomas, and Giddens drafted an ambitious proposal for the inclusion of whitewater competition, both slalom and wildwater (downriver) disciplines, for the 1996 Olympic Games. This draft was accepted tentatively by AOC and incorporated into their pre-bid document presented for review to the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The first disappointment for the Atlanta paddlers came from within the sport organization itself — the International Canoe Federation (ICF) felt that bid-



Stewart Stokes

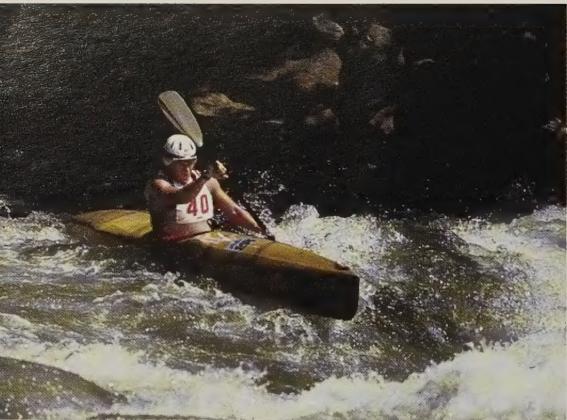
(above)

A hazy race day on the middle Ocoee River.

(opposite page)

Although paddlesport has been included on the Olympic Program since 1936, the discipline of whitewater slalom did not appear until 1972 and again in 1992.

## Whitewater in '96?



David Jones

Unlike their sporty slalom cousins, whitewater boats are designed to plow through the water.

ding for two “new” paddling disciplines at once was too risky. The ICF supported whitewater slalom, an event scheduled to appear in the 1992 Barcelona games. They reasoned that slalom was a better spectator and television event than the 4-kilometer wildwater event. The event supporters were further crushed to learn that the IOC would not entertain an Olympic bid that appeared to expand the 1996 Olympic Games in size and cost, resulting in the whitewater proposal being scrapped from Atlanta’s bid proposal. Fortunately, AOC’s visionary leader, Billy Payne, understood the excitement of the river sport and managed to leave the door open just a crack. When a stunned world heard “It’s Atlanta” on September 18, 1990, the bid accepted by the IOC included one innocent sentence that set the stage for the next 6 years: *“If the IOC chooses to include wildwater canoeing in the programme, the organizing committee is prepared to stage the competition on the Ocoee River...”*



## Whitewater in '96?

The door was open a crack and there was a chance whitewater slalom could be included in 1996. The determined whitewater supporters got energized and organized. Karin Baldzer, wife of professor Giddens and charter member of the ACE, coined the rallying cry “Whitewater in Ninety-Six”, or “WIN”! ACE board member Tim Kelly, a former racer and now partner in KPMG Peat Marwick, recruited Atlanta marketing specialist, Joellen Dickey, from the Atlanta Whitewater Club. Ms. Dickey’s assignment was simple: generate support!

In the fall of 1990, the core group of Jones, Larimer, and Giddens continued to implore the AOC to commit to adopting the whitewater slalom “option.” Their proposal was to hold the event on the popular rafting section of the middle Ocoee River, site of nearly 40 local and regional races over the past decade. By using only temporary event facilities, they reasoned that AOC could cover the low estimated event costs – in the \$3 to \$5 million range. AOC didn’t agree. They countered that WIN needed to bring their own money to the table before AOC would approach IOC about including the whitewater event.

The insistent pressure from WIN eventually exhausted AOC’s patience. One fall morning in 1990, an AOC spokesperson announced to Atlanta media



(left to right) Mike Larimer, Don Giddons, David Jones

that there would be no whitewater events in the 1996 Olympic Games. Mike Larimer, who had scouted the Ocoee as a potential site, knew that all or part of the proposed venue was on land administered by the Cherokee National Forest. Upon hearing this announcement, he called Paul Wright, the USDA Forest

Service's Olympic liaison in Atlanta, to see if he knew the details. Wright had also heard the news and agreed to contact AOC for the facts. Jack Pinkerton, AOC's Director of Sport at the time, assured Wright that the announcement did not discard the language included in the Atlanta bid. However, Pinkerton strongly suggested it was time for WIN to cast a broader net and develop a credible plan that would assure AOC that the event would be financed independently. Otherwise, AOC would soon lose interest in including the whitewater event.

WIN still had hope that they could create a grassroots organization with the strength to meet the AOC challenge. Ms. Dickey had already developed a support base several hundred names deep and had be-

*One of many promotional items designed to generate support for Whitewater in '96.*

gun fund raising. But strong political support would be crucial as well. Tim Kelly approached the Tennessee governor's office with the seed of an idea. A "Tennessee Olympics" was not only a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the State, it was also a potential economic boon for the chronically depressed communities of southeast Tennessee.

Kelly hit it off with Governor McWherter's affable assistant, Jim Hall. Hall was also canny enough to recognize he was being handed an opportunity — an opportunity that could deliver great results for Tennessee, but also one that held potential for disaster. At that time, the State was wrestling with thorny financial issues, such as instituting an unpopular personal income tax as a source of much-needed funds to keep schools open and buses running. The tax issue coupled with the lack of post-use of the 1982 World's Fair facilities in Knoxville, could set off an outcry among voters and legislators who were sensitive to any initiative that would increase State spending.

Hall then met with his old friend and confidant, Whitney Durand, a prominent Chattanooga attorney and chair of the Hamilton County Democratic party. "What are we going to do, Whitney?" sums up the mood of this meeting. The AOC was running out of patience, yet at this moment in time, the State could not pick up the tab. Fortunately, Durand had an unexpected ace up his sleeve. His former classmate and life-long friend, Charlie Battle, was a senior official with the Atlanta Organizing Committee in charge of international relations. Durand approached Battle, who agreed to arrange an audience with Billy Payne. Their message was simple, "Give us



*Tim Kelly*



*Joellen Dickey*

## Whitewater in '96?



(left) Hoyt Firestone, Polk County Executive, and Joe Jacobi, 1992 gold medalist.

suggested that a feasibility study examining the costs and benefits of an Olympic event on the Ocoee would be invaluable in getting the needed political support. Hoyt Firestone, county executive for Polk County, site of the Ocoee River, approached the Copper Basin Development Authority for funding to underwrite such a study. The authority's director, Don Sisson, contracted with KPMG Marwick in Atlanta to begin the study in spring 1991, using grants secured from the TVA and Cherokee National Forest.

The designation of Atlanta as the host city for the 1996 Olympic Games in September 1990, led to the transformation of the AOC to the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG). It also triggered a series of meetings in Tennessee led by Firestone and the WIN team to promote enthusiasm within the local communities, State government, and affected Federal agencies. Disappointingly, support was neither immediate nor universal. One person was even overheard saying that if they acted quickly, they could "kill this thing!"

Throughout 1991, confusion about funding and management responsibility within Tennessee for the proposed event was widespread. Hall, however, had enlisted the support of U.S. Senator Jim Sasser. Sasser was chairman of the Senate Budget Committee and would be influential in getting the Federal support from the Forest Service and TVA that would eventually seal the deal. Sasser's State Director, Bill Hawks, had alerted

a chance." Payne agreed, yet reinforced his message that no costs would be borne by the AOC. He had become particularly touchy about "new" sports, especially after encountering unexpected costs from the softball venue.

Hall informed WIN that they had an exceedingly slim chance of obtaining State support because of the financial concerns. He explained to WIN that not only must they make a strong, convincing proposal to the State, but they must also involve the other land-management agencies with jurisdiction over the Ocoee River – the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the USDA Forest Service. Kelly sug-



(left) TVA Director Johnny Hayes, Senator Jim Sasser, and TVA engineer Paul Lousiou putting the 1:10 scale design model to the test.

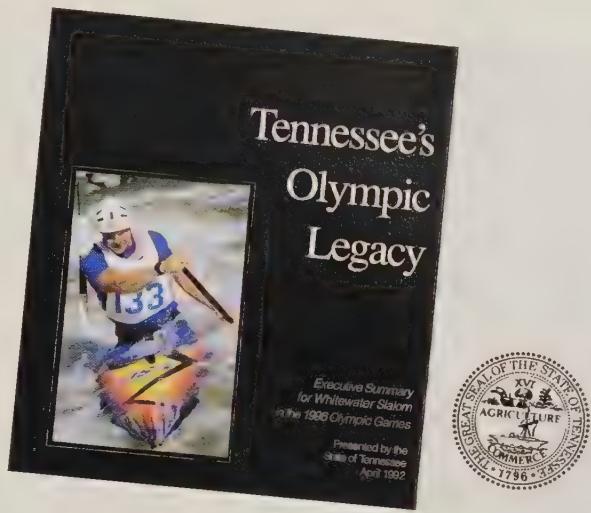
both agencies that they would be called upon to support the effort and that the Senator would in turn provide what support he could in budget actions on Capitol Hill.

As if the political issues were not complicated enough, WIN was also running into difficulty from within the sport. Now that Atlanta had won host-city status, and whitewater slalom had a chance of being included, the U.S. Canoe and Kayak Team (USCKT), which recruits and trains paddlesport athletes to compete in the Olympic Games, began to take a more active interest. Since 1936, they had dealt exclusively with flatwater "sprint," since that was the only paddlesport regularly included on the Olympic programme. Initially, USCKT expressed many of the same concerns that the ICF had already raised about including whitewater slalom in the 1996 Olympic Games and questioned whether the addition of slalom could strain already scarce finances needed to train American athletes at the world class level. Therefore, it fell upon WIN to build support within USCKT as well as the State of Tennessee.

To assist with this promotional effort, WIN developed a marketing piece called "Tennessee's Olympic Legacy" to complement the KPMG Peat Marwick economic feasibility study that was nearing completion. Under tight deadlines, Joellen Dickey, Tim Kelly, and Bill Endicott, 1992 Olympic whitewater coach, spearheaded the production of this document. "Tennessee's Olympic Legacy" summarized the results of the KPMG Marwick feasibility study, highlighting information about the Ocoee River, regional demographics, site development options, venue activity and subsequent benefits, funding strategies, and venue management. This document was completed and presented to Tennessee officials in January 1992 under the auspices of the U.S. Canoe and Kayak Team.

The economic feasibility study, as Kelly had predicted, worked bureaucratic magic. It based its findings on realistic costs, developed by TWH Architects and Betts Engineering of Chattanooga, and conservative benefit projections. For a capital outlay of roughly \$10 million, Tennessee could hope to see as much as \$68 million in total benefits between 1992 and 1997. This was compelling data for State and Federal agencies with economic development mandates — especially when contrasted with economic conditions in Polk County, after the collapse of a century-old copper industry.

The study also pointed out one unexpected issue — the proposed middle Ocoee location could not physically support an event of Olympic proportions without major disruptions to the booming rafting industry, or unacceptable closure of U.S. Highway 64, a vital east-west corridor. Fortunately, a back-up plan had been made by Larimer and staff from the Cherokee National Forest to study an area 2 miles upstream of this site. In December 1991, it was agreed to extend the KPMG Marwick study to include the feasibility of developing a venue on the upper Ocoee, present site of the Ocoee Whitewater Center.



A marketing piece designed to complement the KPMG Peat Marwick economic feasibility study.

## *Sealing the Commitment*

**I**t had been nearly a year since ACOG president and CEO Billy Payne had given Tennessee the go-ahead to explore hosting the whitewater events for the 1996 Olympic Games. The KPMG Marwick feasibility study was complete, showing that the benefits justified the costs. But the question of who was going to be responsible for the event still remained unanswered.

Governor Ned McWherter took charge. He hosted a private luncheon on February 28, 1992, to develop a much needed organization to continue the push for a 1996 Olympic Games venue in Tennessee. The guest list included TVA Chairman Marvin Runyon, USDA Forest Service Regional Forester Jack Alcock, Cherokee National Forest Supervisor John Ramey, USCKT Director Chuck Weilgus, staff from the offices of U.S. Senator James Sasser, Senator Al Gore and U.S. Representative Marilyn Lloyd, U.S. Representative John Duncan, Polk County Executive Hoyt Firestone, State Senator Lou Patten, and State Representative Steve

Bivens. They reviewed the KPMG Peat Marwick final report and discussed the potential economic benefits the project could have on the communities within the Ocoee Region. Governor McWherter then invited every agency leader and elected official to make a commitment statement.

This was perhaps the defining moment in "making it happen". From this meeting, the Forest Service committed to the development of the Ocoee Whitewater Center; TVA to water releases for training and competition; and the State to event operations. All that remained, it seemed, was getting the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games to agree to it all.



SkyShots Photography

*Aerial view of the upper Ocoee River before construction of the Ocoee Whitewater Center.*

## The Wheels are in Motion

**F**ollowing the conclave at the Governor's mansion, a series of letters affirming each agency's commitment was sent to Governor McWherter. Jim Hall left his position within the State to become Governor Clinton's Tennessee presidential campaign chairman. He was replaced by Carol White, who needed some

start-up time to pick up the loose ends, and get the proposal into ACOG's hands.

By May 1992, ACOG had become comfortable with commitments and assurances made by Tennessee and its partners. Payne commended the Governor and his supporters for their efforts and pledged his support before IOC to include the Ocoee in the 1996 agenda of events. However, no decision would be forthcoming until after the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, where the sport would be watched closely for spectator and television audience appeal.

In the meantime, the Forest Service pooled money from the State of Tennessee and TVA to begin the environmental analysis work, since no advance funding

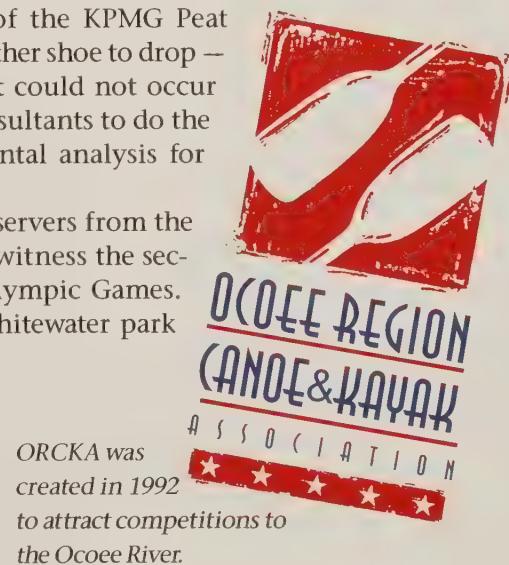


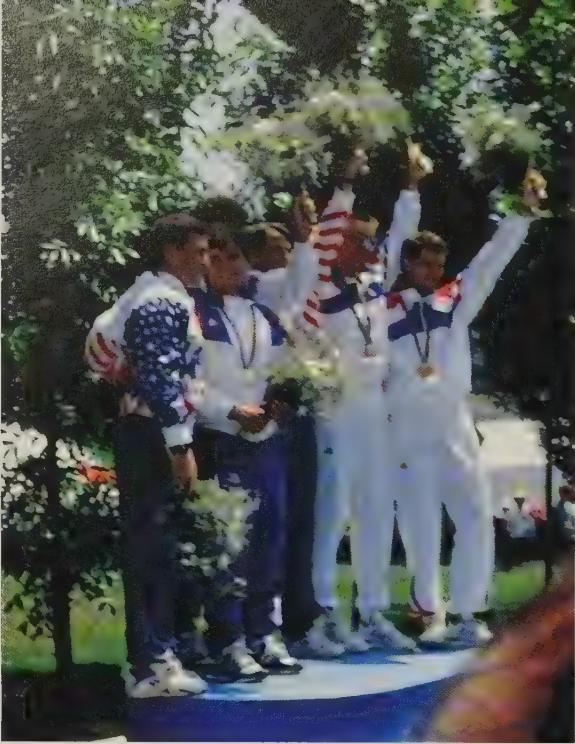
Robert Harrison

The mountain village of La Seu d'Urgell, Spain site of the 1992 Olympic Canoe/Kayak Slalom events.

had been set up by any of the participating agencies. Since mid-1991, as the odds for an Olympic event in Tennessee continued to improve, the Forest Service became increasingly vocal about the need to complete a formal environmental analysis of the upper Ocoee, in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. But because of uncertainty about holding the event, no one had been willing to commit the resources to undertake the analysis. However, with the conclusion of the KPMG Peat Marwick feasibility study, it was time for the other shoe to drop — without the environmental study, the event could not occur on national forest land. A prospectus for consultants to do the initial conceptual planning and environmental analysis for the site was issued in June.

In July 1992, a delegation of official observers from the Forest Service and WIN traveled to Spain to witness the second running of whitewater slalom in the Olympic Games. The Spaniards had built a state-of-the-art whitewater park in the mountain village of La Seu d'Urgell, about 2 hours north of Barcelona. The observation team spent a week tracing down every physical and operational component of the venue. Security, housing, technology, protocol — nothing was overlooked.





Robert Harrison

Americans Joe Jacobi (far left) and Scott Strausbaugh (center) celebrate their gold medal victory at the 1992 Olympic Games.

Everyone attending the 1992 Olympic whitewater competition was confident that the IOC would vote to add the Ocoee to the 1996 agenda. A leading topic among athletes and coaches, who were looking 4 years ahead, was the physical difference between the Seu canal and the awesome size of the Ocoee River. The world was getting ready for the Ocoee.

When the observers returned to Tennessee, they were energized and committed to creating a world class event in 1996. WIN soon evolved into the Ocoee Region Canoe & Kayak Association (ORCKA) with Joellen Dickey as its executive director. ORCKA would act as a "local organizing committee" to attract competitions to the Ocoee and prepare the local communities for international whitewater slalom athletes and visitors. Their first order of business was to secure the 1993 ICF World Cup Finals, giving international athletes perhaps their first look at the Ocoee, and a sense of what might be in store in 1996. ORCKA also began building support within local communities for international caliber competition.

The Forest Service, TVA, and Tennessee began the environmental analysis process in September 1992, holding a series of public meetings and public workshops to surface issues and develop design ideas for adapting the upper Ocoee for world class competition.

Everything seemed to finally be in motion — everything except actually getting the Olympic Games to Tennessee.

## *Persistence Pays Off- the World is Coming to the Ocoee!*

(back row, left to right)  
Kelly; Firestone; Dave  
Maggard, ACOG; Bob  
Morris, TVA; (front row)  
Lou Patten, TODA; Richard  
Fisher, TODA; Billy Payne,  
ACOG; and Gloria  
Manning, USFS.

**I**RCKA succeeded! The International Canoe Federation (ICF) awarded the 1993 World Cup Finals to the Ocoee River and community enthusiasm was contagious. Everyone wanted to see what



"world class whitewater" was all about. Little did it matter that this race would be held on the middle Ocoee at the rafting put-in, the world was coming to the Ocoee! Dickey planned ORCKA's inaugural fund-raising kick-off for the World Cup for the evening of December 16, 1992. Good choice...

Because half a world away, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had convened in Switzerland to review the 1996 Olympic Games agenda. The whitewater events during the Barcelona Games had been a huge success with television viewers and spectators. IOC President Samarache and ICF President Orsi had both been impressed by the powerful visual quality of the swift water and graceful boats. It was rated as one of the top 10 most watched events of the 1992 Olympic Games. The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) made a strong case for the strength of the Tennessee alliance. Those attending the December 16 ORCKA fund-raiser were among the first to hear the announcement – "There will be whitewater in 1996."

This announcement triggered the formalization of the USDA Forest Service's Ocoee River Project in 1993 and TVA began preparing surrounding communities to build on this wonderful event.

In May 1993, the Tennessee Legislature passed House Bill 1045 creating the Tennessee Ocoee Development Agency (TODA) to "plan, finance, develop, manage, and operate an Olympic and other events on the Ocoee River . . .and integrating plans, programs and development activities with the overall economic development of Polk County and southeast Tennessee . . ."

The board of directors, chaired by State Representative Richard Fisher, was appointed by Governor McWherter. Their inaugural meeting was held at Lee College on August 28, 1993. They had a big job ahead of them: select an executive director, finalize the contract between the State of Tennessee and the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, and get the Olympic event planned. But, this is a whole other story . . .

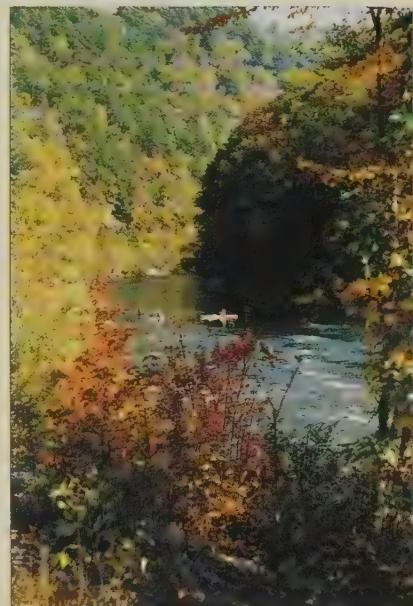
With the commitment made, it was time for the real fun to begin!



## Selection of the Ocoee

The Ocoee River in Tennessee was not the only river considered for the whitewater slalom venue. Four other rivers located in the southeast were also vying for that honor. Three were natural rivers; the others would require construction of an artificial course.

The Chattooga River on the Georgia-South Carolina border was rejected because of the limitations set by its status as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The Nantahala and French Broad rivers in North Carolina were simply too far from the host city. The natural setting of the Ocoee River and two locations on the Chattahoochee River which flows through the host city of Atlanta, soon became the prime targets for the proposed event. The Ocoee River became the preferred site since it could provide event organizers with guaranteed water flow, eliminating the Chattahoochee from consideration.





USDA Forest Service

A view of historic Old Copper Road at Ocoee Powerhouse No. 2. The last remaining 4-mile portion of this road still exists upstream of the Ocoee Whitewater Center. For over 40 years this 33-mile road was the primary lifeline between the Copper Basin and the lower valley. It was blasted out of solid rock in the gorge by workers who were remnants of the Cherokee Indian tribes left in the area after the Trail of Tears exodus.



## Ocoee's Rich History Sets the Stage

"The Ocoee Whitewater Center has returned the paddle sport to its environmental roots, natural rivers," stated Bill Endicott, 1992 U.S. Team Coach.

The Ocoee River has steadily grown in stature, becoming widely known as one of the Southeast's premier whitewater rivers. The rushing water and crushing rapids combined with breathtaking scenery bring more than a quarter-million paddlers and commercial rafters to its middle section each year, while the lower Ocoee offers a calm and gentle float. The upper Ocoee offers a blend of the two lower sections —calm waters with deep pools and wild rapids surrounded by the steep, wooded slopes of the Cherokee National Forest. The highlight of the upper Ocoee is the Ocoee Whitewater Center, site of the 1996 Olympic Slalom Canoe/Kayak Competition. But what makes this river unique is the history of human use its ecosystem experienced for more than a century and the resilience the Ocoee has demonstrated over the past two decades. Today, it is nearly impossible to see the adverse affects of this use on the river environment, but some damage still remains. The Ocoee — despite its wild rapids, sheer cliffs, and clear turquoise water — is virtually sterile.

For countless centuries the pristine Ocoee River flowed undisturbed, draining areas of the Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina mountains. Early Europeans settlers relied on the river for transportation. The upper reach of the river, however, was considered as the "wild sections" where no boats could navigate. But that situation changed shortly after gold was discovered in North Georgia mountain rivers and on Tennessee's Coker Creek, a swift-flowing stream in the



TVA

In 1976 the aging wooden flume line was shut down by TVA for extensive repairs diverting water to the middle Ocoee where fast-flowing water was discovered by whitewater enthusiasts.

## Ocoee's Rich History Sets the Stage

Tennessee Photo Service



*Billows of sulfur dioxide gas hung in the bowl-like basin, and the first documented case of acid rain took its toll in the area. It killed the grass, trees, and even weeds on the mountains for over 50 square miles. With no vegetation to hold the topsoil in place, erosion became a severe problem. With each rain, more and more of the acid-laden soil of the basin washed down the Ocoee. Soon, the Copper Basin took on the look of a barren, red clay desert and most of the river's aquatic life was killed.*



eration alternatives would have on air quality, transportation, the local society and economy, recreation, threatened and endangered species, and cultural resources, as well as geological, hydrological, and biological concerns. Finalized in May 1994, the study concluded that there would be little negative impact on the river environment from construction at the proposed event site. It suggested that the impact on air quality would only be short-term and that traffic flow in the gorge would be minimally impacted by temporarily changing the 4-lane portion of the highway at the event site into a 2-lane roadway, using the closed east-bound lanes for construction and event traffic.

Tellico Mountains just north of the Ocoee and Hiwassee valleys. Prospectors wandered across ridges and through valleys near the Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia lines and into the area that is now known as the Copper Basin.

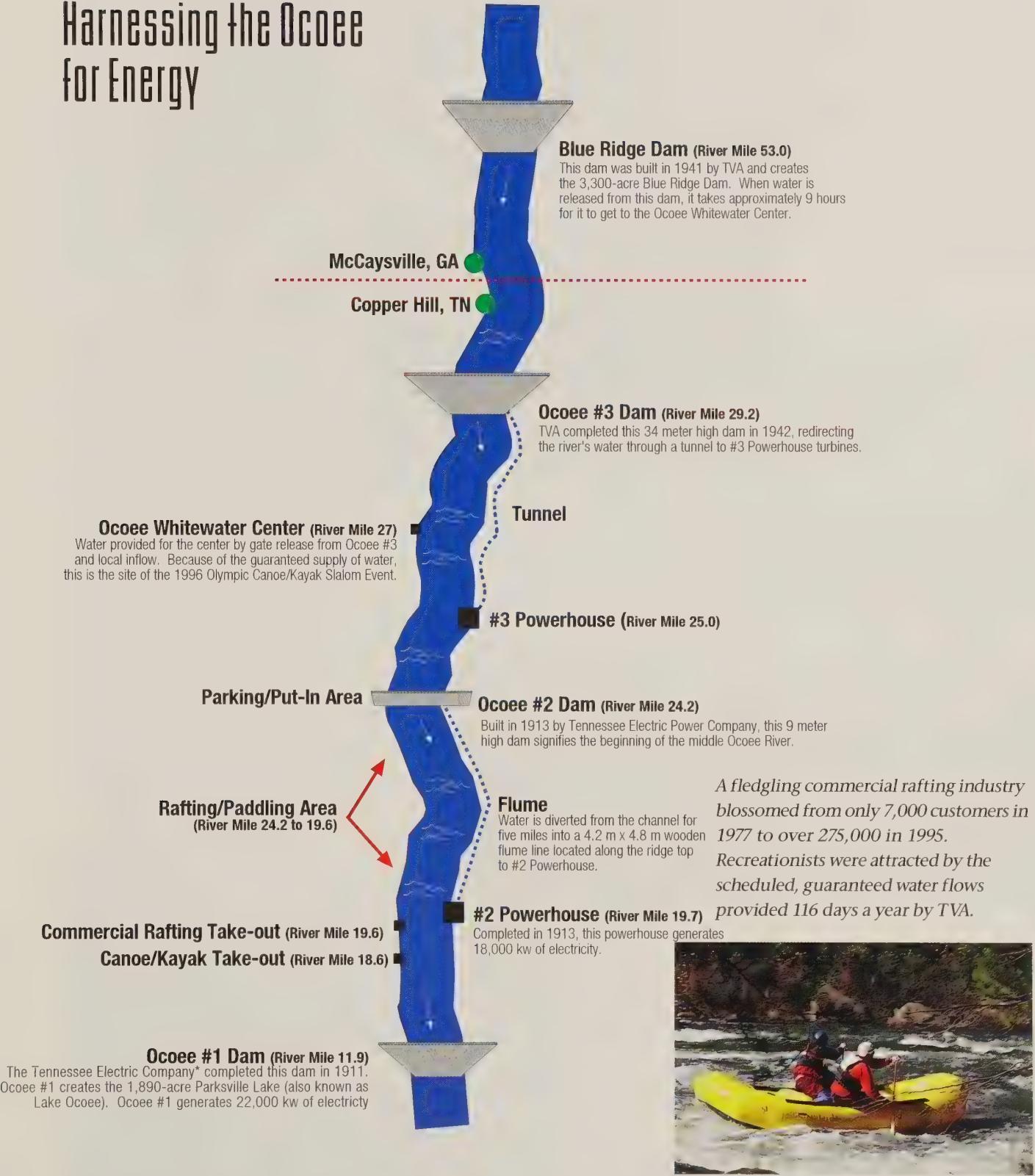
They did not find their "mother lode" of gold, but instead discovered massive veins of rich copper ore. In 1850, a mining operation was planned, and workers used mule teams and Cherokee Indian labor to build the Copper Road along the Ocoee River through the gorge to transport the ore from the "landlocked" Copper Basin to the railroad in Cleveland, Tennessee.

As the ore quality began to drop shortly before the American Civil War, a roasting process, which was state-of-the-art-technology at the time, was developed to smelt the poorer ore closer to the mines. That process required burning thousands of cords of locally cut wood in open pit ovens, separating the copper ore from the sulphurous pyrite. Unfortunately, this process not only stripped the hillsides of timber, but the pit fires created a dangerous byproduct – sulfur dioxide.

When the Forest Service received the proposal from the State of Tennessee to host the event on the Ocoee, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was started in September 1992 in cooperation with the State and TVA to determine the effects the proposed event would have on this fragile ecosystem.

The study looked at the effects various facility developments and event operation alternatives would have on air quality, transportation, the local society and economy, recreation, threatened and endangered species, and cultural resources, as well as geological, hydrological, and biological concerns. Finalized in May 1994, the study concluded that there would be little negative impact on the river environment from construction at the proposed event site. It suggested that the impact on air quality would only be short-term and that traffic flow in the gorge would be minimally impacted by temporarily changing the 4-lane portion of the highway at the event site into a 2-lane roadway, using the closed east-bound lanes for construction and event traffic.

# Harnessing the Ocoee for Energy



\* Chattanooga-based Tennessee Electric Power Company realized the potential of the Ocoee River for electrical power generation and began construction of Ocoee #1 Dam in 1910. The company's power generation holdings were sold to the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1939.

## Ocoee's Rich History Sets the Stage

It also projected that the width of the upper stretch of the Ocoee River would require twice as much water than is released on the middle section for commercial rafting. TVA felt that providing this amount of continuous flows from Lake Blue Ridge for training and competition would cause major fluctuations of the lake level, which was not feasible. Figuring out a way to adapt the river channel to use less water became the key design challenge.

Ironically, because of its extensive history of human use, the Ocoee may

be the only river in the United States that would not suffer environmentally from the work necessary to create the Ocoee Whitewater Center.



At one time, Tennessee's "red desert", was one of the most visible environmental scars seen on the Earth from space (shown above). The past few decades have seen the barren landscape of the Copper Basin evolve into a young pine forest. A cooperative effort by local mining companies, local communities, Soil Conservation Service, TVA, and USDA Forest Service, resulted in the planting of over 18 million trees in the Basin (left). In addition, the installation of pollution-control devices in the acid manufacturing process greatly improved the water quality of the Ocoee.

# Designing Whitewater

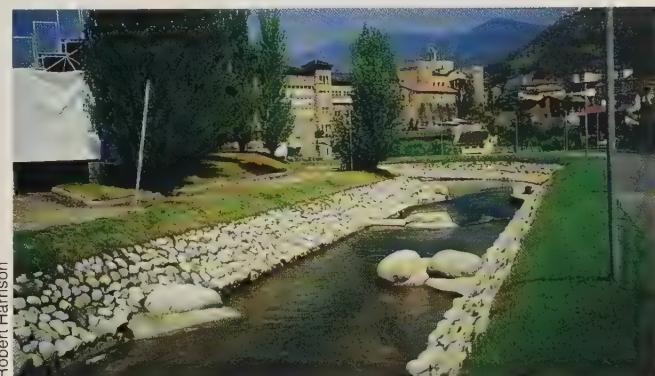
Whitewater design is more art than science. And whitewater artists liked to “tinker” with a river, making it perform better through trial and error. Unfortunately, the Ocoee Whitewater Center design team was facing a tight deadline to start construction and they were only going to have one chance to get it right.

Constructing a “natural-looking” permanent whitewater slalom course within a natural riverbed had never been attempted, although many natural rivers have been adapted for slalom racing through minor boulder relocation.

The selection of the Ocoee River was a refreshing change from the artificial courses, since natural streams tend to behave predictably. However, the stretch of the upper Ocoee where the event would be held required extensive modification to accommodate the limited water supply, develop additional space for facilities, and protect the site from flood damage. The goal of the USDA Forest Service design team was to accentuate the natural qualities of the river while fitting it to the needs of a competitive whitewater course. They were also obligated to respect the strict environmental standards required of a project located in a national forest.

The Forest Service contracted with the Pickering Firm of Memphis, Tennessee, to develop the overall site plan. The Pickering team, led by landscape architect Tom Walsh, in turn subcontracted with whitewater architect John Anderson and the Chattanooga-based firms of TWH Architects, who designed the administration building, and Betts Engineering, who brought civil engineering expertise to the team.

Until now, the Ocoee Whitewater Center had been only a “vision,” not a solid concept. One of Walsh’s first jobs was to determine the “visions” of all the interested parties and merge them into one coordinated plan. His team hosted a series of workshops that involved everyone from whitewater event organizers and officials to athletes and government agencies to de-



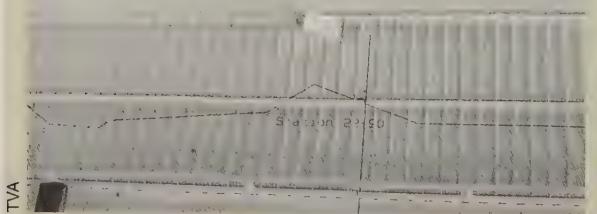
Robert Harrison

Even during the 1972 and 1992 Olympic Games, when whitewater slalom was a sanctioned event, the race courses were set on self-contained concrete canals such as the Le Seu d'Urgell (above) and Augsburg (below) courses with artificial obstacles creating rapids. Athletes often characterize artificial courses as “weird and unnatural.”





## Creation of the model



(top) TVA used household wire wardrobe shelving units to re-create survey points on the model. (middle) The computer cross sections specified the height of each wire, which was then cut and welded to a steel center beam. (bottom) Once the wire was in place, a high strength gravel-concrete mixture was sprayed onto the model to create a pebbled effect for the river bottom.

termine what they thought would make a premier facility.

The Pickering team completed the master plan in December 1992. They reconvened in 1993 to begin developing the final design documents for construction of the whitewater center, adding water resource engineer Rick McLaughlin to the team.

The team of Anderson and McLaughlin is credited with creating the actual whitewater channel design and then monitoring construction to assure that the river "performed" as expected. Anderson, a former international slalom competitor, and McLaughlin were both experienced paddlers who saw the project as more than a job, but a passion!

Anderson, the "artist" of the team, would sketch preliminary course design proposals. Then McLaughlin, with a more technical eye, looked at ways to protect the course and surrounding area from the floods that raged through the Ocoee Gorge, such as the one that hit in early 1990, sending more than 50,000 cubic feet of water per second thundering down the river channel (40 times greater than normal flow). They approached the problem by looking at various wave heights, flow volume and velocity, depth, location of hydraulics or holes, and eddy size. It was extremely important that the final design provide an unlimited number of race layout options. The team also wanted to avoid modifying the channel in ways that might prove deadly to paddlers, such as "keeper holes" or "pinning rocks." Once the ideas were in place, the challenge then became — how to transfer design concepts into construction blueprints. A physical model seemed to be the best approach.

Because of the sophisticated modeling facility at their Norris engineering lab, the Tennessee Valley Authority was contacted to build the model. Initially, they turned down the opportunity because they felt it was too costly. The Forest Service then approached the David Taylor Naval Research Lab in Bethesda, Maryland, as well as the University of Prague in the Czech Republic. Both facilities had competitive, cost-effective modeling solutions that could be used. Meanwhile, TVA had reconsidered, deciding that the costs associated with repeatedly spilling water for a trial-and-error design would cost more in lost power revenue than building a model. So, in spring 1993,



1993 conceptual drawing of Ocoee Whitewater Center during the 1996 Olympic Canoe/Kayak Slalom Competition. The big challenge was applying this vision to the actual riverbed, below.



verbed model. In late spring 1993, Mobley finalized arrangements to survey the competitive channel. He and Loiseau developed a technique to build what would be TVA's largest model ever. With a length of 320 feet and width of 30 feet, it also turned out to be the largest model of a whitewater course ever attempted, anywhere.

The one-tenth (1:10) scale model, where an inch in the model is equivalent to nearly a foot in the actual channel, was constructed in a field downstream of the Parksville Lake dam. Although a model of this detail and magnitude normally would require almost 6 months to complete, the engineers were given a 90-day deadline, with model construction beginning in May 1993.

After taking over 20,000 survey points in the riverbed and translating flow velocities and depths into a computer model, Mobley turned the data over to Loiseau. The points were then logged into a computer, which digitized the data into a terrain model accurate to within 6 inches of the actual channel. Then cross-sections were plotted every 10 feet and printed out at 1:10 scale, equivalent to every foot within the model.

True to the builders' word, the river model was completed in time and dedicated on August 29, 1993, as part of the community activities being held in conjunction with the 1993 World Cup Finals. Several hundred officials, politicians, residents, and athletes watched as the valve was opened and water flowed along

TVA joined the design team and began work on the model.

TVA engineers Mark Mobley and Paul Loiseau devised an unconventional but cost-effective way to build the ri-



TVA Engineers (left) Mobley and (right) Loiseau at Sugarloaf Mountain Park. This community park was created by TVA at the model site and operated by the State of Tennessee.



*Anderson and McLaughlin began the modeling effort by narrowing the stream bed by roughly 50 percent. Sandbags were used to gauge approximate water depths and velocities and pick out key natural river features that "came to life" at the scale competition flow.*

the miniature channel. Several 1:10 scale, 9-inch kayaks made the initial run through the scaled down rapids.

Once Mobley and Loiseau were satisfied with the model's performance, it was turned over to the Forest Service's whitewater design team, led by Anderson and McLaughlin. This pair was joined at various times by several U.S. and European former competitors, as well as TVA's engineers. Their philosophy was simple — focus available water flows on the tremendous rock and ledge features already in the river rather than attempt to create totally new features through changes to the riverbed.

A plan to construct levees along both sides of the river was developed, so that the existing bank area would be increased and the channel narrowed. The levees were designed to be just high enough to contain the competitive river flow, but not high enough to restrict water overflow during flooding. The size and shape of the levees were then transferred to blueprints for construction.

As David Mitchell, the highly respected slalom course designer noted, the section of the river selected and the way in which the design team modified the flow resulted in a course with "progressive difficulty." Over its 500-meter length, the river becomes more technical and increasingly powerful. Therefore, an athlete is fighting a rising fatigue factor as the challenge level goes up. The result is a course that is diabolically successful at separating champions from the field of competitors.

# Bridging the Gap

**B**ridging the gap between the design and construction phases of the Ocoee River Project required, of course, a bridge. Construction of the competitive channel could not begin until a bridge was built to move the heavy equipment across the river.

The original concept called for a small, light-vehicle bridge, but it became apparent that such a bridge could not support the massive bulldozers and trackhoes that would be crossing the river daily. Luckily, as soon as that idea was scrapped, a new one took its place — a portable, military bridge. The only question — where to find it?

After dozens of generally fruitless phone calls, retired Army general and ACOG's Director of Venue Planning, Mike Spiglemire, got involved and started the military ball rolling. The answer was a single-lane, WWII "Bailey" bridge, which was designed to be quickly broken down or assembled during wartime. Such a bridge was found in storage at an Army depot in Pueblo, Colorado, and negotiations began in earnest to obtain the bridge for the Ocoee Whitewater Center. Meetings were arranged between the Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Army. Ocoee Project Director Paul Wright, of the Forest Service, later described it as "a bridge built on a mountain of words."



USDA Forest Service

Pier construction for the lower bridge began in May 1994, with Simpson Bridge Company selected as the contractor.



Soldiers assembled the bridge in six-foot sections.

## Bridging the Gap

USDA Forest Service



Once the bridge was assembled, members of the 41st Bridge Company, 128th Corps Support Battalion from Fort Campbell pushed the 20-ton structure (above) across the piers (below).

The 200-foot long bridge kit was transported to the Ocoee Gorge from Colorado on seven semi-trucks. The 41st Bridge Company, 128th Corps Support Battalion of the U.S. Army from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, was recruited to assemble the bridge as a training exercise. This would be the last mission of the 41st, which was scheduled to be deactivated on September 30, 1994, as a post-Cold War "peace dividend."



A light rain was falling on the day the bridge was rolled onto its support piers. After 4 days of inventorying parts and assembling the sections of the bridge, soldiers manually pushed the bridge onto large rollers mounted on the two concrete piers built in the river channel. Lined along the highway side of the river the soldiers, on command, slowly began to push the 20-ton structure along its ingeniously built glides until the portable span rested on "river left." Company commander Captain Craig Korcz said that under wartime conditions, the bridge could be erected in just 8 hours.

Later, an oak deck, donated by the Tennessee Forestry Association through the National Forest Foundation, was installed

as the finished driving surface. The total contributed value of the bridge (materials, labor, and decking) was nearly \$400,000, an important savings for the entire project.

The bridge was formally dedicated July 15, 1994, signaling the completion of Phase I of the four-phase construction timeline. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Nashville District Commander, Lt. Col. J. David Norwood, was keynote speaker for the dedication, which was well attended by local, State, and Federal officials.

Now the actual modification of the river channel could begin.



*Installation of the Bailey bridge signified completion of Phase I of the project.*

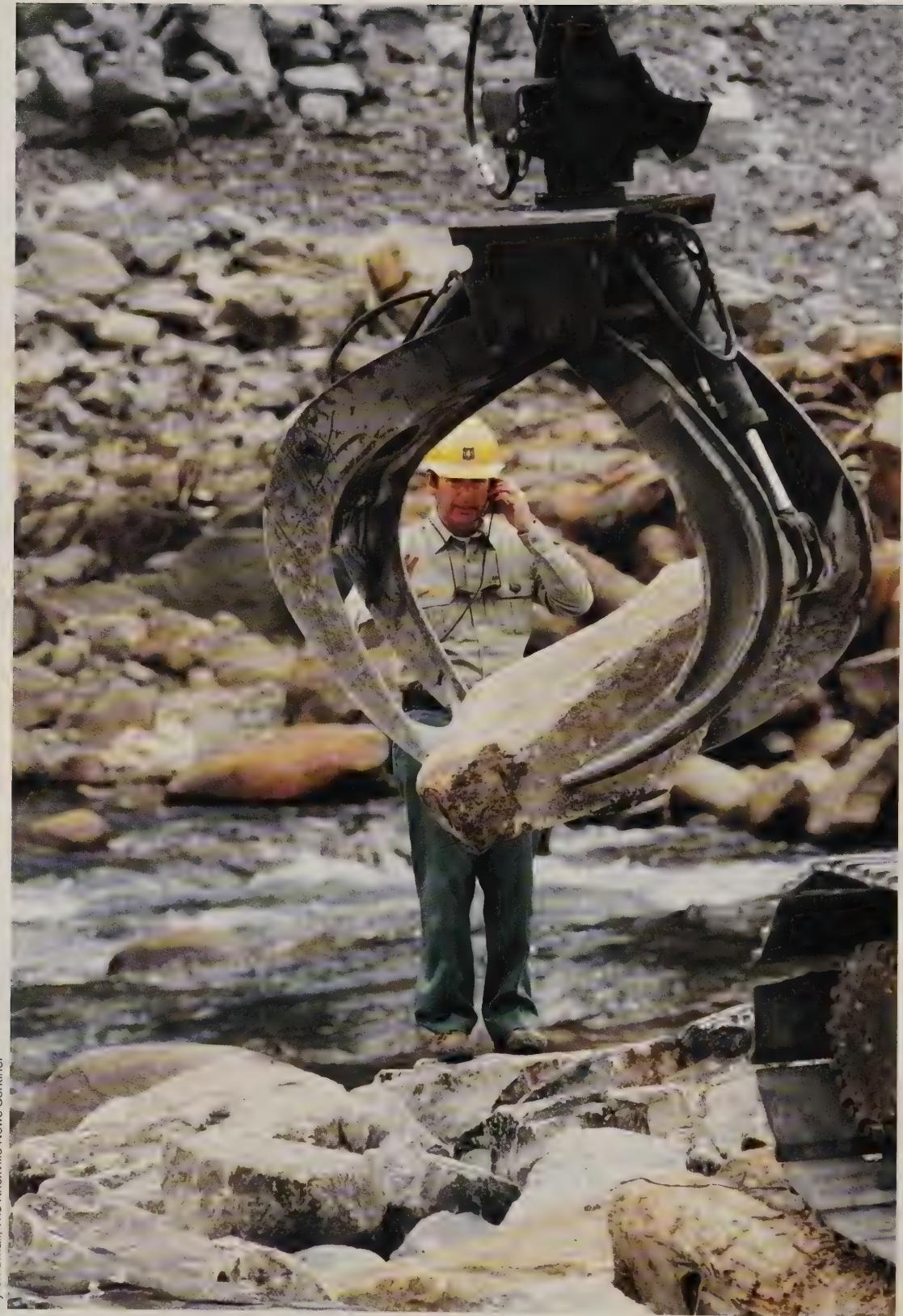
USDA Forest Service

## legacy Bridge

A second bridge was constructed near the Administration Building in April 1996 to provide quick access for visitors, boaters, coaches, and emergency personnel to "river left." A prefabricated steel bridge was custom designed for the second crossing. Known as a "cable-stay" bridge, the unit differs from a normal suspension bridge in that supporting cables are stretched from tall pylons directly to the bridge deck, rather than from a suspended cable above the deck. The total span of the bridge is 336 feet, with a clear span between the piers of about 200 feet. The treated pine decking is about 20 feet above the river bed, and the entire span is built above the estimated 500-year flood level. The bridge was fabricated by the Steadfast Bridge Company of Fort Payne, Alabama.



USDA Forest Service



Byron Small, The Knoxville News Sentinel



## *It Had To Work Well, Look Good, and Stay Put*

The natural river setting of the Ocoee Whitewater Center competitive channel is what sets it apart from its two Olympic predecessors. Yet, it is also a carefully designed channel challenging the world's best whitewater paddlers while maintaining its natural character. It thereby marries the best of the natural and artificial worlds.

The contract for the channel work was awarded to L-J Inc., of Columbia, South Carolina. The company had experience in sea wall construction and natural rock work, including a stream channel within the Augusta National Golf Course, but this was the first time L-J workers had actually tackled a full-sized riverbed.



USDA Forest Service

*The initial task faced by workers included scouring the sides of the channel of loose rock and boulders to be used in others phases of the project. It was necessary to remove loose rocks from the river sides in order to give the new levees a solid bond to the river's bedrock.*

Work began in October 1994 under the oversight of Forest Service engineer, Jerry Barrow and his inspectors, Steve Cromer, and Ron McCall.

Much of the preliminary channel construction was done during the winter of 1994. Workers, with Forest Service engineers by their sides, had to battle the water, bitter

(opposite page) Bill Peach, project manager, directs the placement of a 6-ton boulder. Over 60,000 tons of boulders were placed one-at-a-time so they would blend with the river environment.

## *It Had To Work Well, Look Good, and Stay Put*



USDA Forest Service

Over 60,000 tons of rocks and boulders were needed to construct the levees. About 25,000 tons of surfacing boulders came from a centuries-old rock slide on the west slope of nearby Chilhowee Mountain. The remaining structural core rock came from S&S Quarry, located in Ocoee, Tennessee. These rocks were stacked along U.S. Highway 64, creating a half-mile-long mountain of boulders, and sorted by size and shape so rocks of specified dimensions could easily be found.

cold, winds, snow, and ice. Each morning the pumps were cranked up and water removed from the section of river where workers would be that day. This often left layers of ice suspended above the channel. Those hazardous, glass-like sheets had to be broken with the buckets of the trackhoes before workers could continue their work. Not surprisingly, these harsh working conditions led to a rapid turnover of workers.

With the bedrock clean, construction of the levee began. The rocks, weighing up to 7 tons, were placed one-at-a-time to ensure a perfect fit into the bedrock. Large trackhoes with hydraulic grapples carefully lifted the boulders and set them into place. Workers then adjusted the rocks, making sure their final position complied with the design scheme. "This job was unique in that there was a place for every rock," said Mac Morris, L-J job superintendent. "We had to place every rock. Something like this had never before been done."

The surface of each massive rock was pressure cleaned before being hoisted into their notch on the levee. Then



USDA Forest Service

Adding to the excitement, heavy rain began to fall in the area on the evening of February 14, 1995. By 1:30 a.m. it became apparent that TVA had to release water into the channel and workers were given 2 hours notice to remove equipment from the gorge. By the time the water rose to the highway, most of the heavy equipment had been moved.

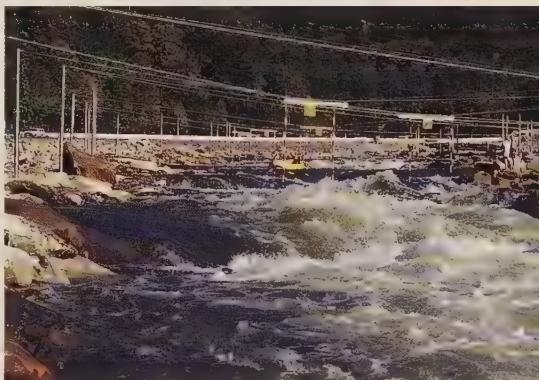


Over 12,000 cubic yards of concrete grout was used in the river construction project (enough grout to make a driveway 10 feet wide, 19 miles long).

a specially formulated concrete grout was pumped into the spaces around and below the rock, slowly creating a solid, permanent bank along each side of the river channel. Unlike the grout used in bathrooms, this grout had a breaking strength of 6,000 pounds per square inch and was made of concrete, polypropylene fiber, and other strength-increasing components.

Boulders salvaged from the sides of the riverbed were stored nearby and mixed in with the last layer of surface rocks, helping to blend the work into the natural "rock-scape" of the existing riverbed.

In areas where adding boulders was not appropriate, artificial or "faux" rock features were created, similar to features used in modern zoos and aquariums. Blending seamlessly into the river, these rocks modify existing features, serving both hydraulic and aesthetic purposes slow pools were replaced with waves, and holes and eddies were created below



The gate system was specially designed for the Ocoee Whitewater Center.



Jim Brown (left) and Larry Mashburn (right) adjust gate position.

## *It Had To Work Well, Look Good, and Stay Put*



*Small rocks and pebbles were then embedded into the wet grout surface by hand, to conceal the grout and complete the "natural" look. The result was a finish that closely resembled the deposits of sand and rock that naturally occurred in the riverbed.*

Planning, designing and constructing the Ocoee Whitewater Center's competitive course involved a lot of theory, plus solid faith in the course designers' abilities. But by the summer of 1995, it was time to find out if the years of planning and months of construction had accomplished their purpose.

Every month, from June 1995 to course completion in August, water was released into the channel to test the modifications made the month before and to identify needed changes. Each test showed greater and greater promise. Once complete, the "enhanced channel" exceeded every-one's expectations. The modifications are as strong as the riverbed itself.

Even the gate system for the Ocoee Whitewater Center is specially designed. Architect John Anderson used modified, 100-pound, 15- to 18-foot aluminum flag poles to create the masts, which are easily placed into one of the 216 stainless steel sleeve bases embedded 3 feet into the rock levees.

The cables that stretch across the river can be raised or lowered to position the height of the gates suspended from each cable. In addition, ropes

the rapids for an occasional safe haven or upstream move for boaters.

The Forest Service contracted with The Larson Company, based in Tucson, Arizona, who specialize in creation of natural-looking rock formations, to add these mini-sculptures to the Ocoee. Although they have designed displays for zoos, nature parks and aquariums throughout the world, including the Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga and in the open ocean at Monterey Bay Aquarium in California, this was a new challenge for the company a natural riverbed.



*Whitewater experts study to see if channel modifications are working as planned.*

USDA Forest Service



*Artisans then sculpted the concrete, creating crevices with trowels and then dotting the newly created rock with sponges to give it a rough, natural texture.*

connected to the gates allow them to be moved horizontally across the river with pulleys to various locations along the cable between the masts.

"This is without a doubt the most fantastic whitewater slalom course in the world," judged Albert Woods, chairman of the International Canoe Federation Slalom and Wildwater Committee at the 1995 Ocoee Slalom Challenge and World Cup Final.

The lessons learned during that inaugural event and other races held in the spring of 1996 would help officials, judges, course designers, and other volunteers prepare for the big one — the 1996 Olympic Slalom Canoe/Kayak Competition.



*Concrete was pumped in and around the framework, shaping the basic rock form. Workers sprayed a final 4- to 6-inch layer of colored, high-strength concrete onto the rock surface.*



*The finished product took on the appearance of massive stones created eons ago when the river was formed. Larson officials say the natural red stains carried out of the Copper Basin by the Ocoee River will enhance the rocks even further, and a visitor to the river will have a difficult time recognizing what parts of the rock formations are artificial.*



## Completing the Legacy

No dream is complete without a castle — a castle made of stone buttresses and massive wood beams that radiate strength and endurance. This part of the dream may seem far-fetched for the 20th century — or is it? Built into the hillside, the Ocoee Whitewater Center's administration building presents a commanding view of the river below while blending into the rustic setting of the Ocoee River gorge.

It was designed not only to provide spectacular panoramic views of the gorge, but also to serve as the functional hub of the Center. Defining "functional", however, was the first, and in some respects, the most formidable task of the building's designer, TWH Architects of Chattanooga.

The TWH team, led by Vance Travis, held a series of workshops and meetings with the many interested parties to determine the functional design for the building. Their job was not easy. They not only had to plan for the functional



demands of the 1996 Olympic Games, but more importantly, the long-term operational requirements of the entire whitewater center.

Their initial design resembled more of a "wish list." The building would be over 16,000 square feet. It would include visitor information, restrooms,



USDA Forest Service

(top right) Southern pine laminated roof beams and steel bracing form the building's skeleton.

(right) Mountain sandstone form massive steps leading visitors to the river's edge.

vending and retail sales, administrative offices, storage, caretakers quarters, race operations area, and team facilities. During the 1996 Olympic Games, the building would serve as the venue communication center, as well as provide a hospitality area for the Olympic Family and other dignitaries. However, 16,000 square feet was not cost-effective, and therefore not feasible.

Once again, TWH pulled together the interested parties. They laid out the initial design and said, "OK, let's cut some space." They refined the "wants" into "needs" eliminating the training aspect of the building, combining functions into shared space, and moving others into adjacent outdoor space. Designers found that storage space could become operating space during races. Viewing space was moved outdoors onto terraces and decks. By the time the meeting was over, the architectural working group trimmed the building down to 7,600 square feet, a size that was affordable and functional.

Aesthetically, TWH was challenged with creating a building that blended with the site, rather than overpowering the focal point, the river. Their solution emphasized the use of natural materials, such as wood and stone. The building itself would be built into the hillside overlooking the river. It would be shaped in a broad, gentle curve following the flow of the river below. Massive wood beams, oversized stone columns, and a low-sloping roof were used to communicate a feeling of weight and a sense of permanence – much like the rocks and ledges of the river itself.

On August 7, 1995, WDB Construction of Chattanooga, Tennessee, was awarded with the contract and issued the notice to proceed. Construction began 2 weeks later and continued through mid-1996, finishing just

  
Every Thursday for 3 weeks, it snowed 3 to 7 inches at the site. This is no big deal in Minnesota, but tough in Tennessee.

USDA Forest Service

weeks before the Olympic Games. The contractor had less than a year to complete the building and surrounding grounds.

The winter of 1995/1996 saw record low temperatures and above normal snowfall. Temperatures dipped below zero several times, making it difficult to do the initial concrete foundation work. Delivery of the massive laminated roof beams from upstate New York was delayed 2 weeks when the northeast was hit by a huge snow storm. But workers braved the elements and by the end of February masons were beginning to cover the foundation with the native stone that would give the building its natural appearance.

Even at this phase of construction, several last-minute changes were being made. The roof was changed from slate grey to a rustic red so that it would blend better with the Center's surrounding elements. Interior tiles and colors



were updated. Interior support columns were moved to open up exhibit space. Like every other phase of the project, designers stayed one foot ahead of the bulldozers.

A series of ramped walkways was designed to provide easy pedestrian circulation throughout the Center. They lead visitors from the main parking area near the building to the terraces that line both sides of the river, the "Blue Hole" swimming area, the historic "Old Copper Road," and the Center's unique pedestrian bridge.

Also with spring came the planting of the Center's native garden. Most of the plantings are located along the terrace between the building and the lower half of the course. The garden was designed to soften the Center's rocky environment, allowing the landscape to blend into the surrounding forest. More than 100 trees, 300 shrubs, and 600 perennials, all native to the area, were planted around the site in 1996. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service provided the plants as part of a study of the use of native plants in landscaping.

One-quarter of the building has been dedicated to a paddlesport exhibit, installed after the 1996 Olympic Games. The exhibit was developed by the American Canoe Association (ACA) and is a permanent fixture at the administration building.

ACA executive director Jeff Yeager describes the exhibit as an "arm chair" display that is passive yet interactive, containing items to interest the visitor at the Center. People viewing the exhibit should acquire an appreciation for what happened at this site in 1996, find out who competed here, and learn how they too could experience whitewater paddlesport — from guided raft trips in the area to becoming a competitor themselves.

The displays are a legacy to the dedication of those who devoted thousands of hours to planning, negotiating, constructing, and volunteering to create the Ocoee Whitewater Center. The administration building and its exhibits stand as a reminder that sometimes the impossible can be accomplished when government and people work together for a common goal.



Native grass (above) was one of many types of plants provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service as part of a study on the use of native plants in landscaping. Plants were selectively placed to soften the Center's rocky landscape. (right)





## A Testimony to Those Who Refused To Give Up On a Dream

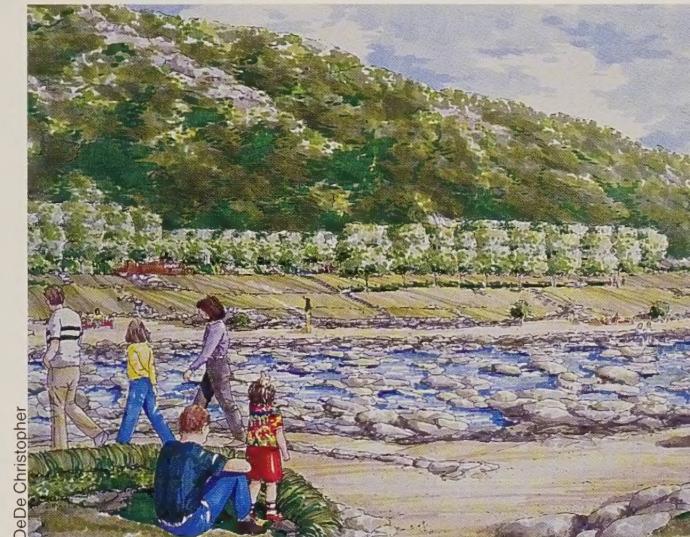
The Ocoee Whitewater Center began as a dream – an Atlanta dentist’s dream of Olympic racing on the Ocoee River. It grew to be the dream embraced by thousands of whitewater enthusiasts around the world. The dream received vital support from local, State, and Federal officials who saw the potential benefits to their constituents. Although the road to the 1996 Olympic Games was not always a smooth one, marked by a series of close calls, the dream at last became reality – the Ocoee Whitewater Center, site of the 1996 Olympic Slalom Canoe/Kayak Competition.

The Ocoee Whitewater Center is a monument to the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games and much more. It is a monument to the thousands of volunteers who traded their time and talents to be a part of history. It is a monument to the people of the Ocoee Region who forgot about state and county boundaries, joined forces and worked together. It is a monument to those who contributed financially to the cause. It is also a tribute to the local, State, and Federal government agencies, who, when others said it could not be done, worked even harder to make the dream a reality.

But was all of this just for a 3-day event? Certainly not. It was done to promote the quality of life and sustainable economic development within the Ocoee Region, to advance the sport of whitewater slalom, and to promote river stewardship, without which river recreation and a whitewater industry could not be possible. Publicity and broadcast coverage received throughout the 1996 Olympic Games have helped enormously to accelerate the Ocoee Region’s revitalization.

The Ocoee Whitewater Center will endure as North America’s premier whitewater facility. The commitment to quality and attention to detail at every phase of construction, combined with the rugged, inspiring scenery of the Cherokee National Forest has led to the creation of a facility like none other in the world. Future whitewater events will continue to spread the name of the Ocoee internationally.

The 1996 Centennial Olympic Games are now a page in history, but the Ocoee Whitewater Center and its fabulous course remain, a testimony to those who refused to give up on a dream.



DeDe Christopher

Conceptual drawing of the Ocoee Whitewater Center as a river park, one of its many future uses.



On December 16, 1992, the IOC announced that the Ocoee River had been selected as the site of the 1996 Olympic Canoe/Kayak Slalom Competition. This triggered the formalization of the USDA Forest Service's Ocoee River Project. Members of this team include: (bottom, left to right) Jerry Barrow, project engineer; Paul Wright, project director; Miera Crawford, communication's manager; (middle row, left to right) Kent Evans, special use permit administrator; Linda Melton, administrative assistant; Beverly Brantley, receptionist; Mary Hughes Frye, landscape architect; (top, left to right) Steve Cromer, engineering inspector; William Peach, project manager; Stephanie Gomes, communications assistant; Bob Griffeth, contracting officer; and Ron McCall, engineering inspector.





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A handwritten signature is written across the bottom of the page, appearing to read "John H. Block".



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*The rising popularity of the Ocoee River led to its selection as  
the site of the 1996 Olympic Canoe\Kayak Slalom  
Competition.*